Jan Loop

Johann Heinrich Hottinger, Arabic and Islamic Studies in the Seventeenth Century

In April 1667 the Governors of the University of Leiden invited the Swiss scholar Johann Heinrich Hottinger of Zurich to take up its Chair of Theology after the death of Johannes Hoornbeek. With an annual stipend of 2,000 guilders it was the most prestigious and best-paid position the university had to offer. However, it was not to be: on 5 June 1667, when Hottinger was travelling down the river Limmat together with his family, the boat capsized. Hottinger, apparently a good swimmer, managed to gain the shore, but as soon as he saw that his family were in danger he immediately jumped back into the water to save them, and drowned in the effort. During his short life, Hottinger showed himself just as courageous, tenacious, and energetic in his scholarly pursuits. The present book is the first full-length biography of this intriguing scholar, written by Jan Loop, Lecturer in Early Modern History at the University of Kent. During the preparation of his monograph, Loop was attached to the Warburg Institute of the University of London, perhaps the foremost centre in the world for the study of early Oriental scholarship in the West.

Hottinger was regarded as one of the luminaries of his age by his Protestant contemporaries, but Loop describes him as “a man with a short life, a poor library, and a divine mission,” three factors which were “responsible for many of the flaws and shortcomings of his work” (152–153). Bridging the gap between the opinion of Hottinger’s fellow scholars and coreligionists on one side, and the latter verdict on the other appears like squaring the circle, but Loop manages to do so convincingly in this thoughtful and well-written book. It describes the broad outlines of Hottinger’s career from his early years at the Schola Tigurinorum Carolina of Zurich, and an eighteen-month spell as a student at the University of Groningen in 1638–1639, to his fourteen-month stay at Leiden in 1640–1641, where he studied Oriental languages under the benevolent guidance of Jacobus Golius (1596–1667), who gave him a position as private tutor to his children and offered him shelter in his own home. While in Leiden, Hottinger had the run of the Oriental collections of the University Library and Golius’s sizeable private collection, and he made as many copies as he could. In 1641 the Zurich city council, which had paid his expenses, ordered Hottinger back. In the following year he accepted his first appointment as Professor of Church History at the Zurich High School. In 1655 the Elector Palatine Karl Ludwig invited Hottinger to teach at the University of Heidelberg, the “spearhead of the Reformed religion in Germany” (35), where he served...
as academic rector until 1661. After spending another period at Zurich and declining invitations from Deventer, Marburg, Amsterdam, and Bremen (all of them academic institutions with impeccable Reformed credentials), he finally accepted the Chair of Theology at Leiden, with the consequences as described above.

The main focus of Loop's book is, however, on Johann Heinrich Hottinger's more than twenty publications. Most, if not all of these rely heavily on Hottinger's expertise in the field of Oriental languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Ethiopic, and especially Arabic—, and Islam. To these works, ranging in size from simple printed lectures to a nine-volume *Historia Ecclesiastica Novi Testamenti* (partly printed at Hanau, not Hanover as Loop has it, 1651–1667), he devoted most of his inexhaustible energy. If local printers in Heidelberg or Zurich lacked Arabic typographical materials, Hottinger saw to it that these were imported from abroad. It is well known that the study of Arabic and Islam received a strong impetus from the rise of the Ottoman Empire in sixteenth-century Europe, and that it was hoped that Oriental scholarship would help refute the 'arch-heresies' of the 'pseudo-prophet Muhammad,' but the present work on Hottinger reveals a completely different line of thought, propounded by Loop with great clarity and force of arguments: the religious polemics between Protestantism and the Roman Catholic Church. It is fairly easy to understand why Arabic, as a close cognate of Hebrew, was deemed useful by Protestant Bible scholars as part of their *Ad Fontes* and *Sola Scriptura* approach, but Hottinger used comparative Semitic philology to defend the absolute reliability of the transmitted text of the Hebrew Bible. In the long run, however, the development of philology would achieve exactly the opposite: that Hebrew was a language like any other, and that the Bible was prone to change just like any other text (80).

Loop distinguishes two historical lines in Hottinger's ideas on early Christianity and Islam. The first is that the purity of early Christianity was revived by the Reformation; the second is that decadence and corruption in the Church started in the seventh century, when the Bishops of Rome emerged as Supreme Pontiff, and when Muhammad and his successors overran much of the Byzantine Empire. Following earlier Protestant thinkers, Hottinger identified two antichrists, the pope in the West and Muhammad in the East (46–47). Perhaps Hottinger's preeminence as a Reformed thinker can only be properly assessed in the light of the violent reactions of his Roman Catholic opponents, such as the Greek scholar and librarian Leo Allatius (d. 1669), who wrote a 600-page refutation of Hottinger's ideas on the Eastern Church (195–197).

From an Arabist's point of view, Hottinger's *Promtuarium; sive, Bibliotheca Orientalis* (Heidelberg: Adrianus Wyngaerden, 1658) is by far his most impor-